

SCHOOL CHOICE ISSUES IN THE STATE



Parent Choice for Georgia:

Many agree with the concept. Some disagree. And some simply want more information. As the public debate continues to grow louder about how best to provide a quality education to all Georgia children, it is critical to know the facts about parent choice, and to have an understanding of how parent choice programs have had an impact on communities, parents and students around the country. All of this analysis is done with one goal in mind: The best possible education for all of Georgia's children.

Georgia's Opinion on School Vouchers

Prepared By:

Robert C. Enlow

Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation

March 2007

**Study released jointly by the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation,
the Alliance for School Choice, the Archdiocese of Atlanta, the Georgia
Family Council, and the Southeastern Legal Foundation**

A MESSAGE FROM THE FRIEDMAN FOUNDATION:

OUR CHALLENGE TO YOU

Our research adheres to the highest standards of scientific rigor. We know that one reason the school choice movement has achieved such great success is because the empirical evidence really does show that school choice works. More and more people are dropping their opposition to school choice as they become familiar with the large body of high-quality scientific studies that supports it. Having racked up a steady record of success through good science, why would we sabotage our credibility with junk science?

This is our answer to those who say we can't produce credible research because we aren't neutral about school choice. Some people think that good science can only be produced by researchers who have no opinions about the things they study. Like robots, these neutral researchers are supposed to carry out their analyses without actually thinking or caring about the subjects they study.

But what's the point of doing science in the first place if we're never allowed to come to any conclusions? Why would we want to stay neutral when some policies are solidly proven to work, and others are proven to fail?

That's why it's foolish to dismiss all the studies showing that school choice works on grounds that they were conducted by researchers who think that school choice works. If we take that approach, we would have to dismiss all the studies showing that smoking causes cancer, because all of them were conducted by researchers who think that smoking causes cancer. We would end up rejecting all science across the board.

The sensible approach is to accept studies that follow sound scientific methods, and reject those that don't. Science produces reliable empirical information, not because scientists are devoid of opinions and motives, but because the rigorous procedural rules of science prevent the researchers' opinions and motives from determining their results. If research adheres to scientific standards, its results can be relied upon no matter who conducted it. If not, then the biases of the researcher do become relevant, because lack of scientific rigor opens the door for those biases to affect the results.

So if you're skeptical about our research on school choice, this is our challenge to you: prove us wrong. Judge our work by scientific standards and see how it measures up. If you can find anything in our work that doesn't follow sound empirical methods, by all means say so. We welcome any and all scientific critique of our work. But if you can't find anything scientifically wrong with it, don't complain that our findings can't be true just because we're not neutral. That may make a good sound bite, but what lurks behind it is a flat rejection of science.

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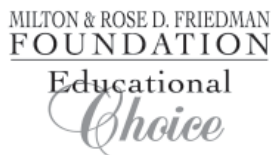
Robert C. Enlow

Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation

Poll taken by:

Strategic Vision, LLC

March 2007



About the Author



Robert Enlow has been the Executive Director of the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, an organization dedicated to educating the public on the issue of school choice, since late 2004. He joined the Friedman Foundation when it first opened in 1996, serving as projects coordinator and vice president before being named executive director and COO.

Under his leadership the Friedman Foundation has become one of the nation's leading researchers on the issue of school choice. He is the Co-editor of the book *Liberty and Learning, Milton Friedman's Voucher Idea at Fifty*, author of *Grading Vouchers, Ranking America's School Choice Programs*, and co-author of *School Choice: A Reform that Works* and "Early School Choice," a chapter in *An Education Agenda: Let Parents Choose Their Children's School*. His articles and quotes have appeared in numerous publications including the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Arizona Republic* and *National Review*.

About Strategic Vision, LLC



STRATEGIC VISION, LLC
CORPORATE, LITERARY, POLITICAL

Strategic Vision, LLC is an Atlanta-headquartered public relations and public affairs agency with a division that specializes in polling. Our team is knowledgeable about politics and current events throughout the nation and operates nationally on a variety of races and issue advocacy programs. Among the media that Strategic Vision's polls have been used by include FOX News Channel, Newsweek, Bloomberg News, Time Magazine, BBC, ABC News, Scripps Howard, the Washington Times, and USA Today. The company's polls have been cited as some of the most accurate by National Journal's Hotline.

About the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation



The Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation is a non-profit organization established in 1996. The origins of the foundation lie in the Friedmans' long-standing concern about the serious deficiencies in America's elementary and secondary public schools. The best way to improve the quality of education, they believe, is to enable all parents with the freedom to choose the schools that their children attend. The Friedman Foundation builds upon this vision, clarifies its meaning to the public and amplifies the national call for true education reform through school choice.

About the Alliance for School Choice



The Alliance for School Choice works to build support for and implement publicly funded school choice programs that provide low-income families with educational opportunity. In doing so, the Alliance not only protects those programs that are already serving families in need, but also expands and enhances them and—most importantly—initiates new, larger and even more effective models.

About the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta



The Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta celebrates fifty years of serving the people of North Georgia in 2006. Through 95 parishes and missions, the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta offers the Holy Eucharist and pastoral care to over 600,000 people. Services include two Catholic hospitals, 35 special centers for social services, 4 homes for the aged, 1 health care center, and 24 Catholic Schools. Catholic Charities offers services to people who are in need from all faiths.

About the Georgia Family Council



Georgia Family Council (GFC) is a non-profit organization that exists to strengthen and defend the family in Georgia by equipping marriage advocates, shaping laws, preparing the next generation and influencing culture. GFC is working with leaders throughout the state to prevent family breakdown and its costly and devastating effects on the lives of children, adults, businesses and communities.

About the Southeastern Legal Foundation



Southeastern Legal Foundation, founded in 1976, is an Atlanta-based constitutional public interest law firm and policy center. The Foundation's mandate is to protect individual liberty, defend the free enterprise system, and advocate for limited government in the courts of law and public opinion. The Foundation has built an impressive record of successful litigation, including a number of landmark victories in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 8

Methodology 9

Results 10

Demographics 21

Executive Summary

This scientifically representative poll of 1,200 likely Georgia voters measures public opinion on school vouchers, both in general and specifically for special education students. While naysayers often claim that the public doesn't support school vouchers, this poll finds that Georgians strongly support them. The poll also shows that most Georgians have not accepted the claims used to oppose school vouchers, such as the claims that private schools don't serve disabled students or that parents shouldn't be put in charge of educational decisions for their children. Conducted March 20-22 by Strategic Vision, LLC, the poll has an error margin smaller than plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Key findings include:

- **K-12 education is the top priority of Georgia voters**—33 percent picked K-12 education as the most important issue facing Georgia, more than any other issue by a large margin (the next most common response was jobs and economic growth, at 21 percent).
- **Georgians strongly support school vouchers, both in general and in the context of special education.** When asked about a bill currently being debated by the Georgia legislature that would provide school vouchers to special education students, 59 percent said they favored this policy, while only 20 percent were unfavorable. Questions about vouchers in general produced very similar results: 58 percent of Georgians favor school vouchers, while just 22 percent were unfavorable.
- **Georgia voters are more likely to vote for a state representative or senator who supports school vouchers.** Four times as many voters said they would be more likely to vote for a legislator who supports vouchers (54 percent) as said they would be less likely (13 percent).
- **Georgians believe that school choice improves K-12 education.** A majority of Georgians (53 percent versus 29 percent) agree that school vouchers improve K-12 education by allowing parents the freedom to choose the best education for their child. In addition, when asked what appeals to them the most about school choice and vouchers, 38 percent cited parents choosing the best school for their children and 21 percent cited better education and curriculum.
- **Georgians reject the claim that private schools don't serve disabled students and they are strong supporters of private education**—54 percent said private schools do a better job of educating special needs students than public schools, while only 8 percent said they do a worse job. In addition, if it were up to Georgians a strong majority would choose private and home schools for their children - 59 percent would select a private school or homeschool environment versus 27 percent who would choose a public school environment.
- **Georgians overwhelmingly believe that parents, not school administrators, are best prepared to make educational choices for children.** A resounding 82 percent of Georgia voters think that parents are better able to make educational choices for their children than school administrators; only 12 percent say school administrators know better than parents.

- **School vouchers are favored in all areas of the state.** The strongest support for school vouchers can be found in Gwinnett, Cobb, Douglas, Forsyth, Cherokee, Glynn and Muscogee Counties. A resounding 70 percent of Middle Georgia supported school vouchers, as did 57 percent of those in the Atlanta area, 54 percent of those in North Georgia and 53 percent of those in South Georgia.
- **Vouchers for special needs students are favored by all racial groups.** The strongest support for special needs vouchers is seen among whites (66 percent favor), Asians (60% percent favor) and Hispanics (59 percent favor). African-Americans in Georgia also support vouchers for special needs students (46 percent favor to 37% oppose).
- **A majority of all racial groups support the idea that school vouchers should be available to all children regardless of income.** Support for this concept is highest among whites (73 percent), but the concept finds strong support among Asians (61 percent), Hispanics (59 percent) and African-Americans (51 percent).
- **A significant majority of all regions believe that private schools do a better job at meeting the challenges of students with special needs.** Fully 57 percent of those in Atlanta and South Georgia believe that private schools do a better job at meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Those in middle Georgia and North Georgia also believe that private schools do a better job, 55 percent and 47 percent respectively. Fewer than 1 in 10 people anywhere in the state think that private schools do a worse job of educating special needs students.

Methodology

This survey provides a statistically valid representation of the views of likely Georgia voters on school vouchers, both in general and specifically for special education students. A total of 1,200 completed interviews were obtained. This provides statistical significance more than sufficient for decision-making purposes. The statistical margin of error at the conventional 95 percent confidence level is smaller than plus or minus 3 percentage points.

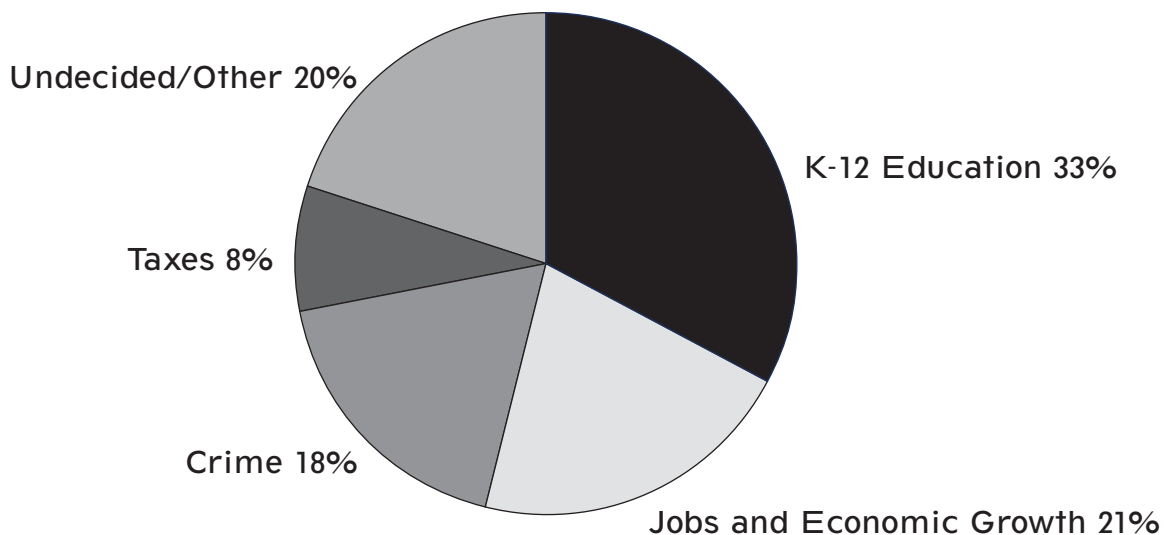
For this survey, the research firm Strategic Vision, LLC conducted phone interviews of a random sample of registered Georgia voters from its call center. Interviews were conducted from March 20 to March 22, 2007.

Respondents were asked whether they had voted in the 2006 election and were planning to vote in the next election. Respondents who satisfied both these criteria were classified as “likely voters” and were included in the survey. Respondents who either did not vote in 2006 or were not likely to vote in the next election were not included.

Results

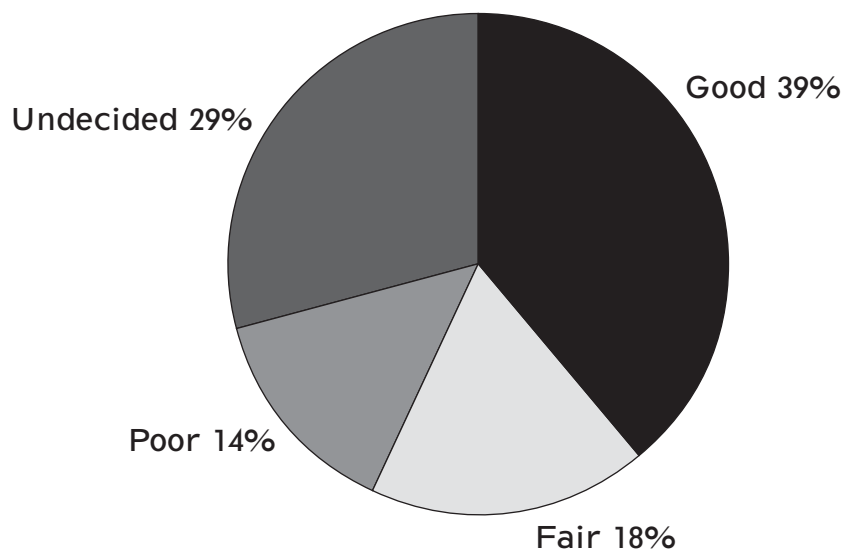
The following are the results of the survey.

1. I am going to name several issues facing the State of Georgia, and I would like you to select the one that is most important to you. _____

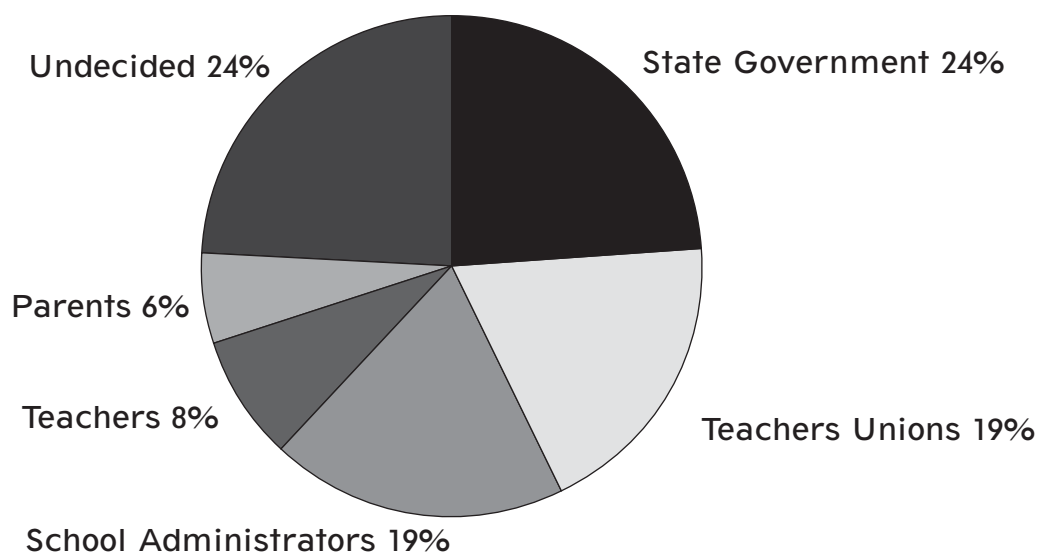


The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

2. How would you rate Georgia's public school system? _____

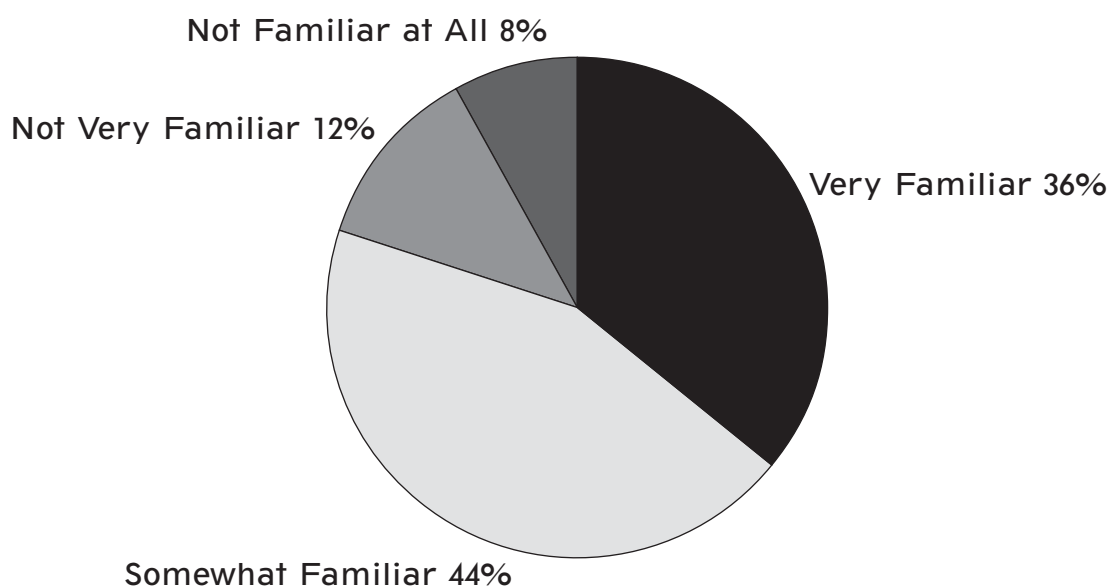


3. You rated Georgia public schools as fair or poor. Who is responsible for the situation of Georgia's public school system? _____

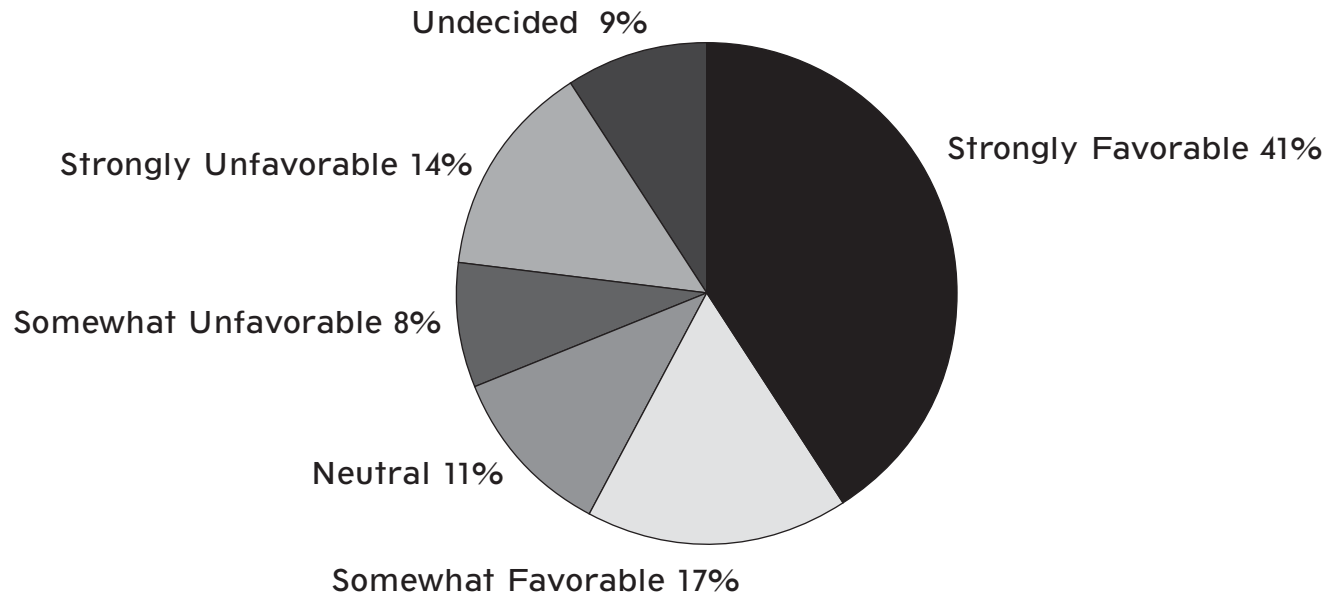


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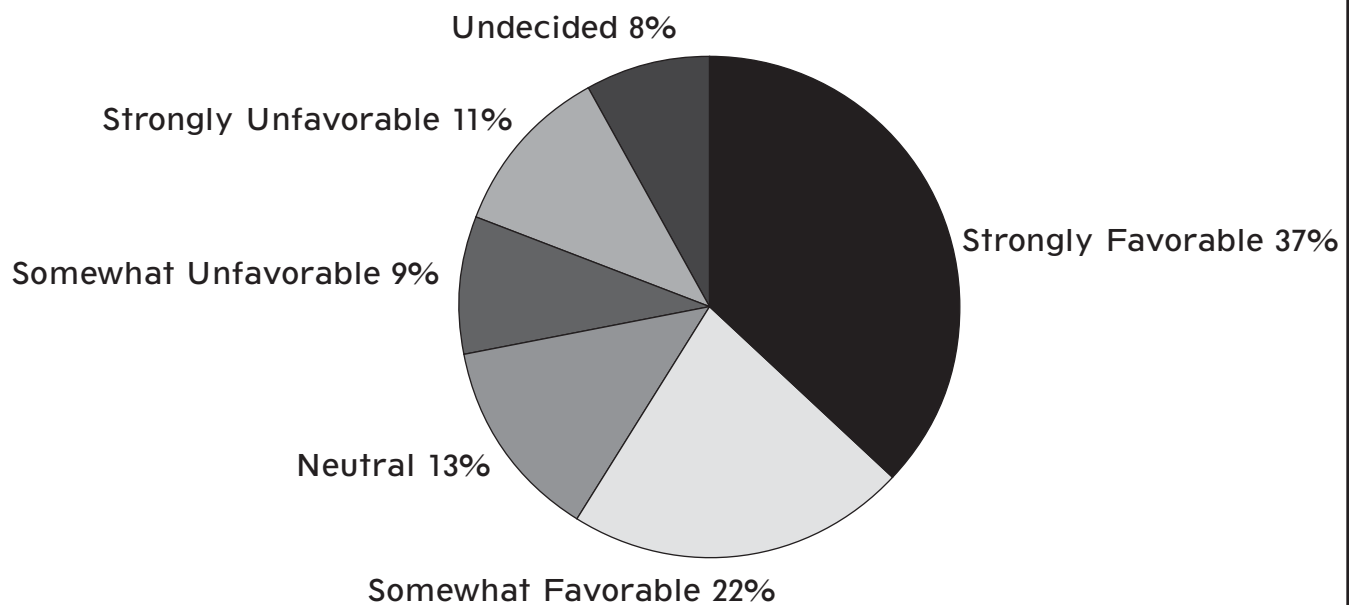
4. In Georgia there is a debate over the direction of K-12 education. Some people promote an approach that would allow parents the option of sending their children to the school of their choice, whether that school is public or private. If this approach were adopted, tax dollars currently allocated to a school district would be allocated to parents in the form of a school voucher to help pay for the school they choose to send their child to. How familiar are you with this approach to education? _____



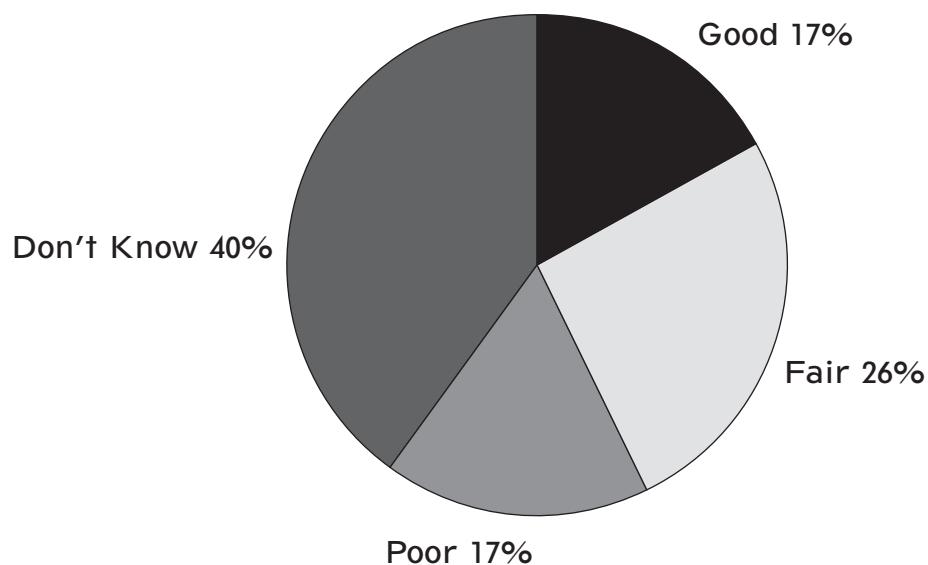
5. Would you say that you are personally favorable or unfavorable towards an approach which would allow Georgia parents the ability to use a school voucher to choose which school to send their children to?



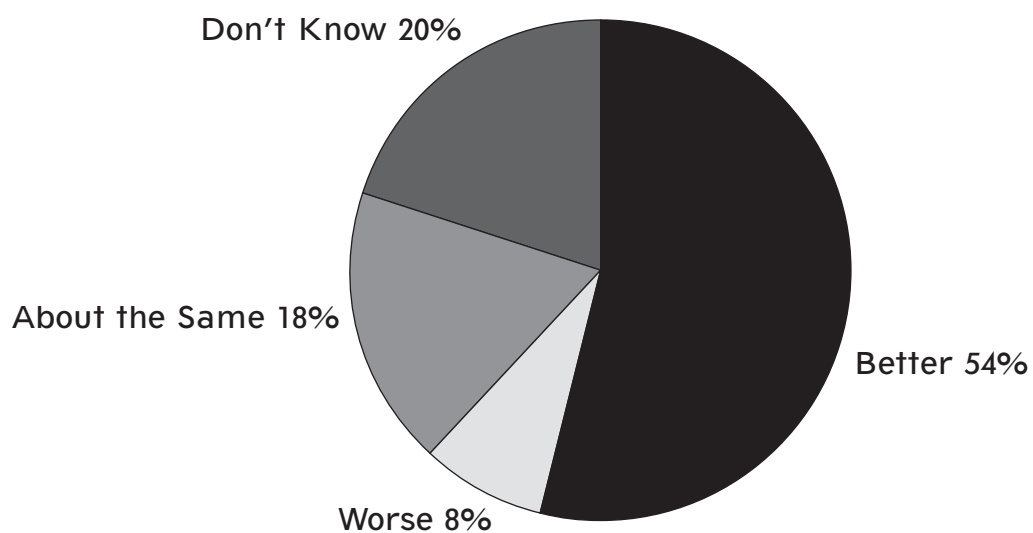
6. The Georgia legislature is currently debating a bill that would allow parents of children with special educational needs to use a voucher to send their children to a private or public school of their choice. Would you say that you are personally favorable or unfavorable to this approach of allowing parents of children with disabilities to send their children to the school of their choice?



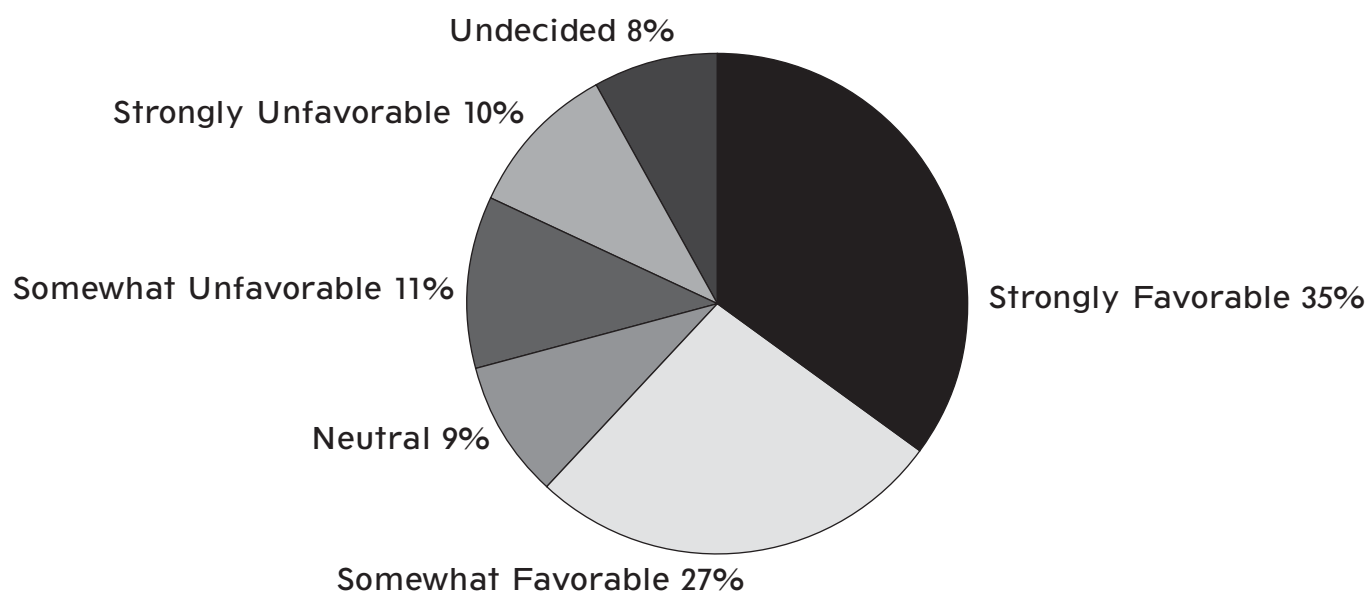
7. How would you rate Georgia's public school system when it comes to how well they educate students with special needs? _____



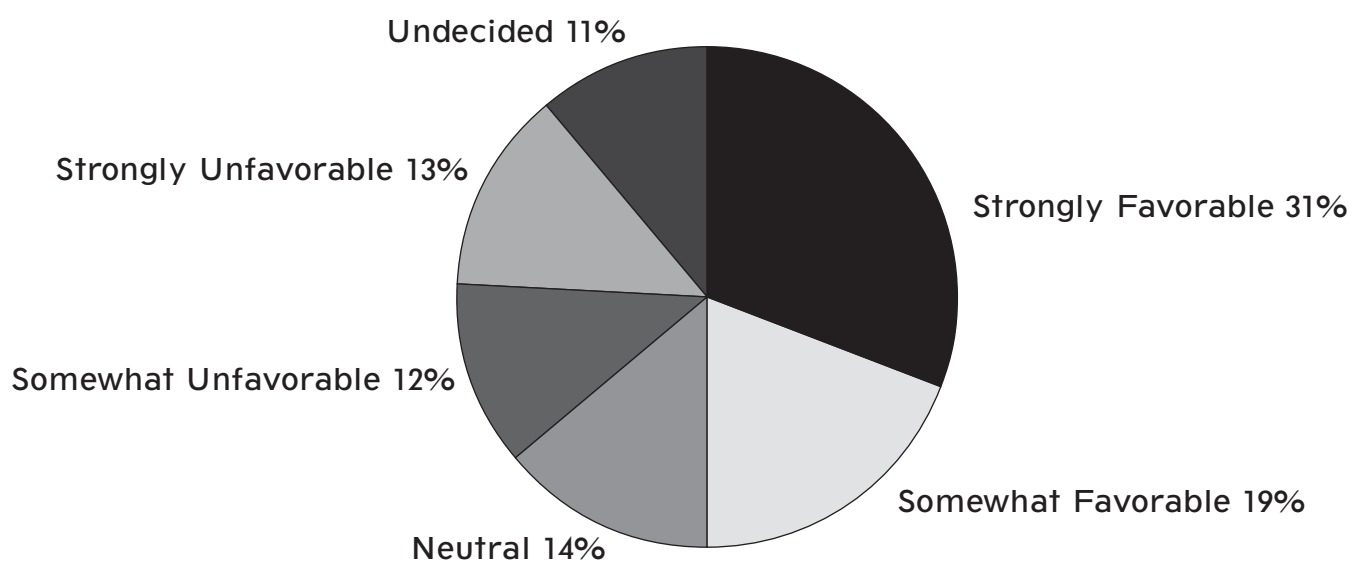
8. In your opinion, do you think private schools in Georgia do a better job, worse job or about the same job as public schools at meeting the challenges of educating special needs children? _____



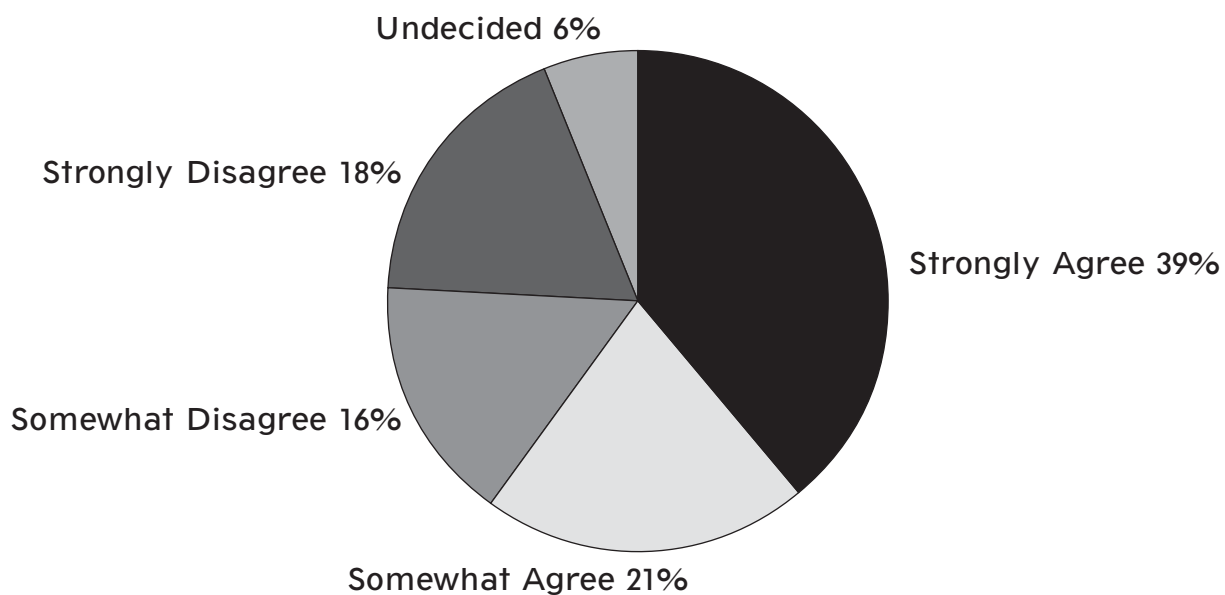
9. Would you say that you are personally favorable or unfavorable towards an approach which would allow Georgia parents the ability to use a special needs scholarship to choose which school to send their children to?



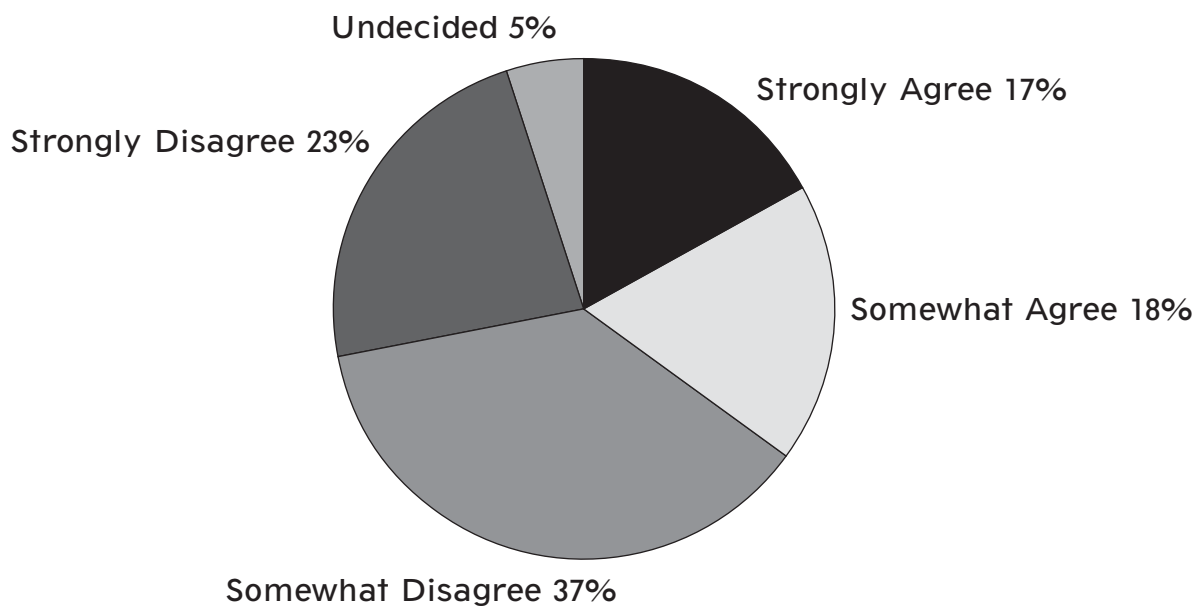
10. If a private school offered the best education available for a child with special needs, would you favor allowing parents the option of using public funds to send their children to a private school?



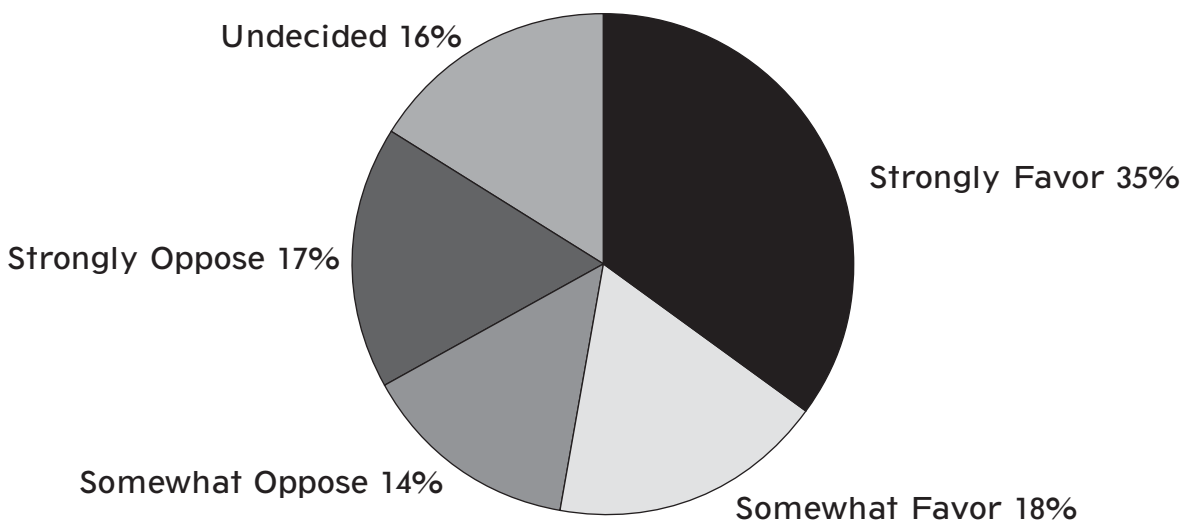
11. Some people believe that school choice and vouchers should be available to all parents regardless of incomes and needs. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? _____



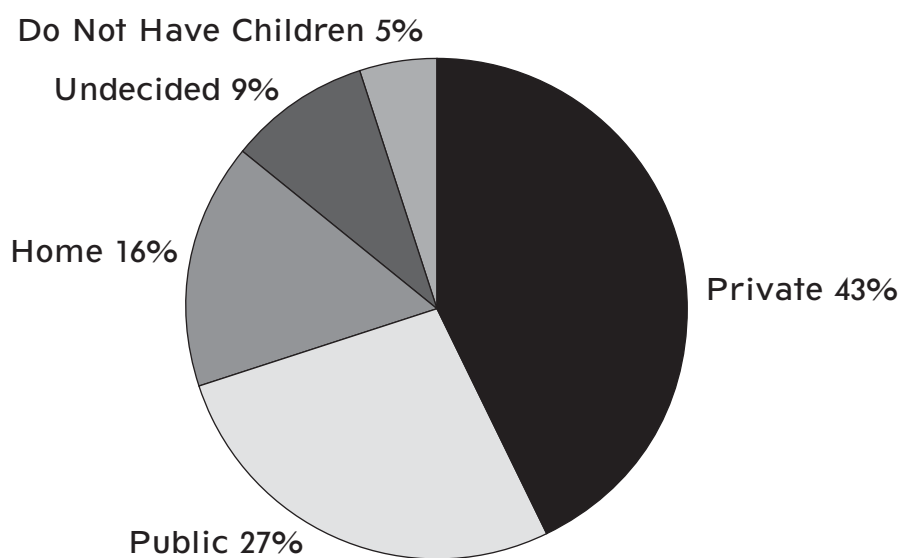
12. Some people believe that school choice and vouchers should only be available to low-income families or to families with children in failing public schools. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? _____



13. Some have suggested that instead of a school voucher, that the state should give a tax credit to parents to allow them to select the public or private school of their choice. Would you favor this approach?

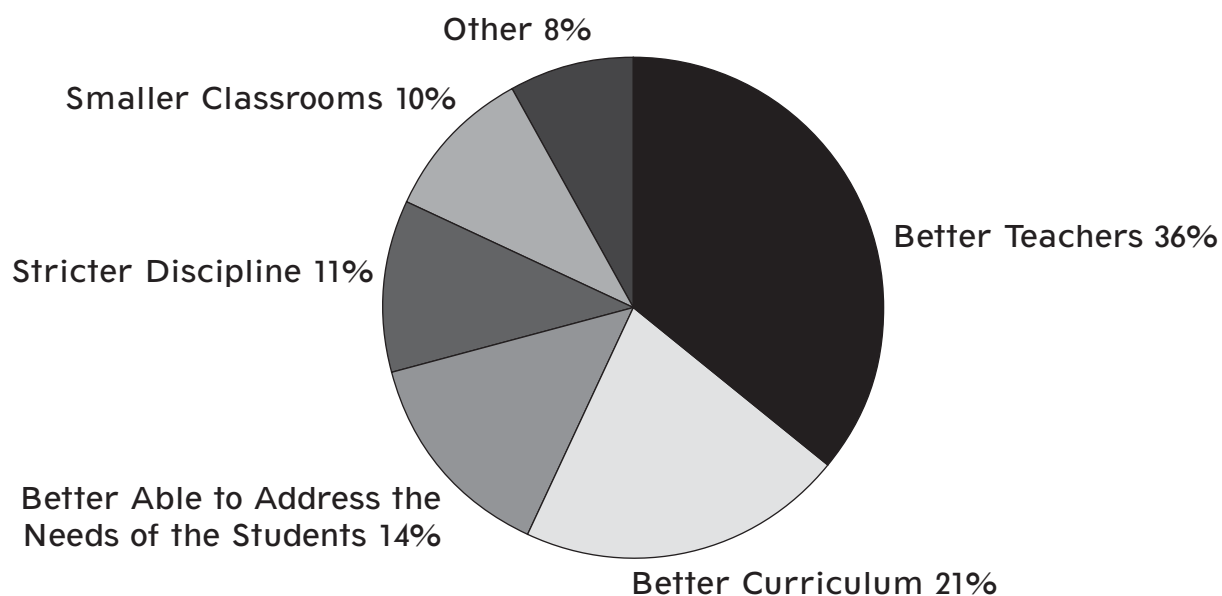


14. If it were your decision, would you select a public school, private school, or homeschooling for your children?



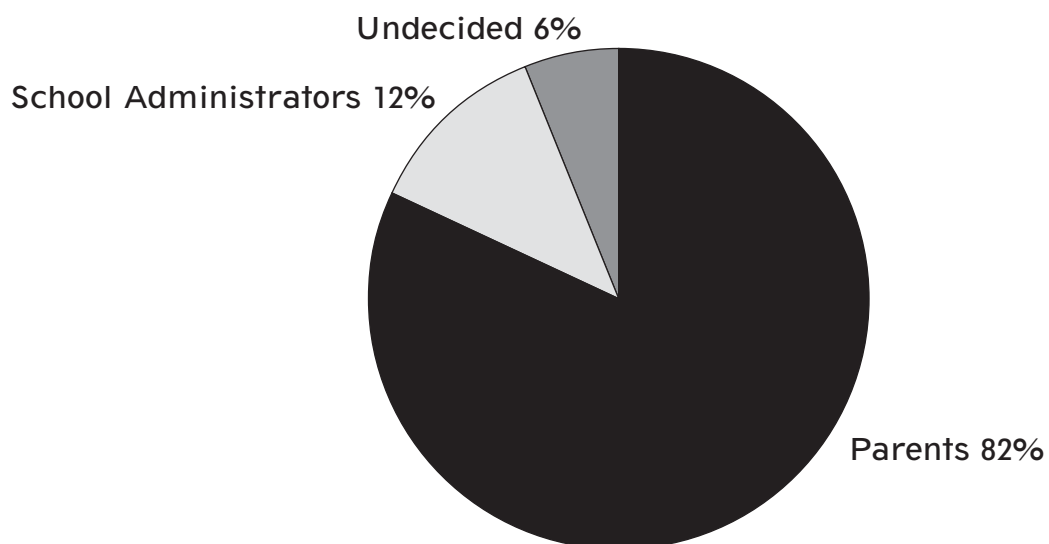
"Do Not Have Children" was not offered as an option; respondents had to volunteer it.

15. Why would you select a private school?

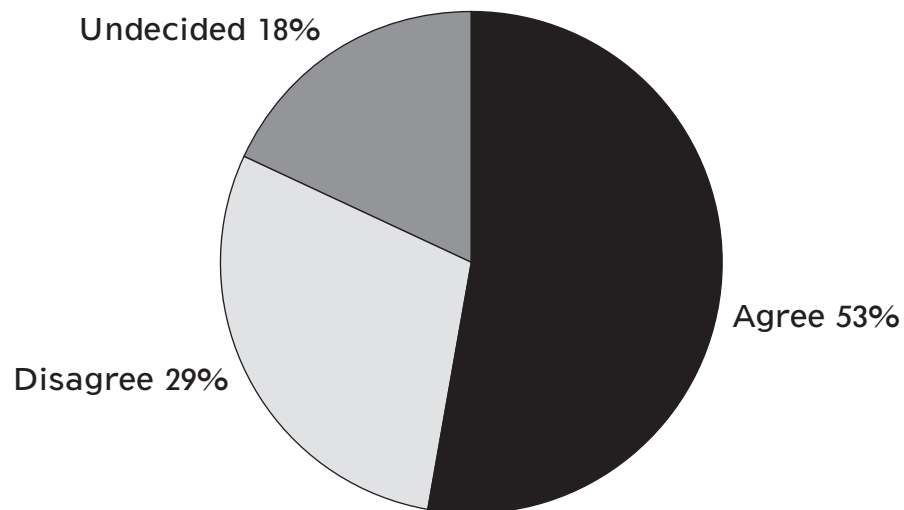


The order of the possible responses was rotated to avoid bias.

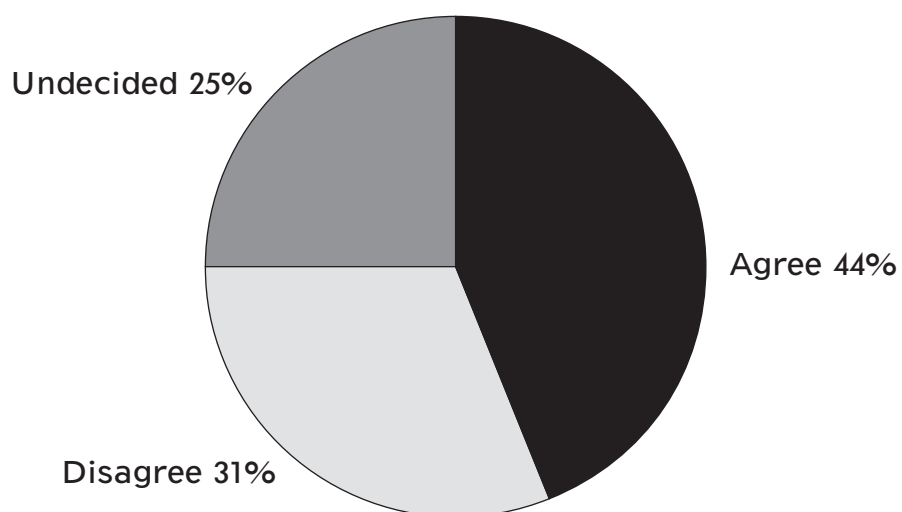
16. Who do you think is best prepared to make educational choices for children, parents or school administrators?



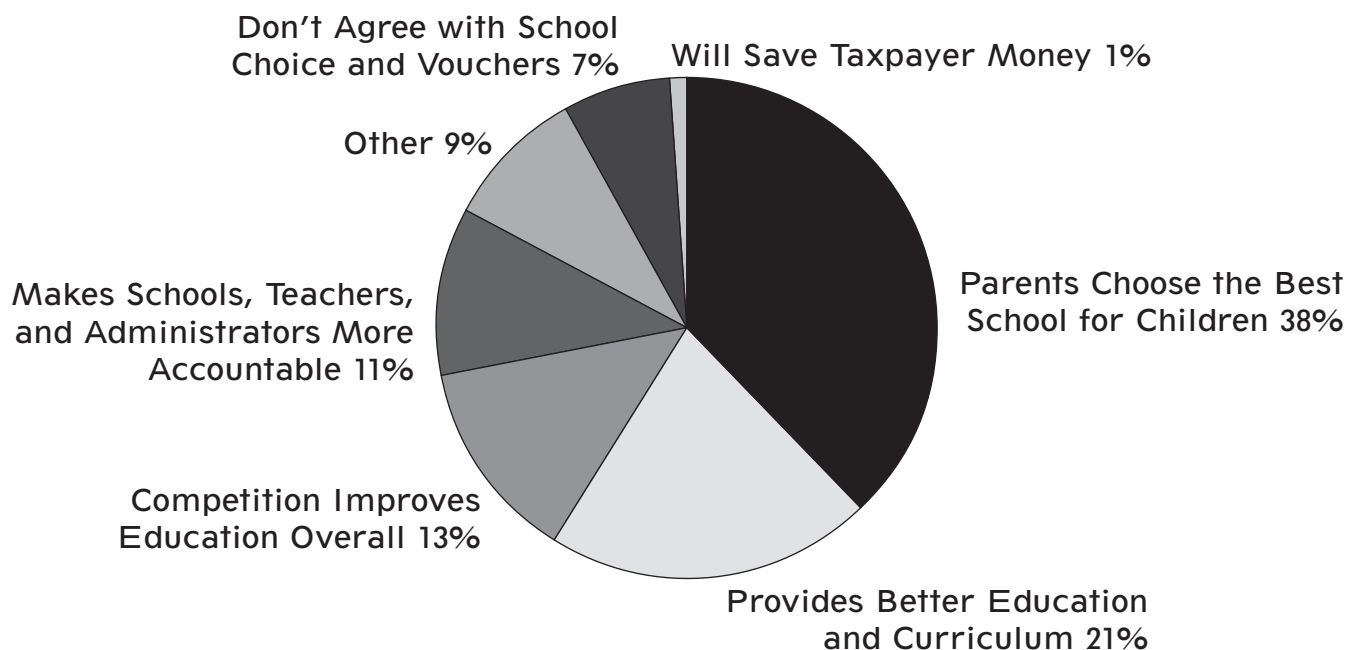
17. One argument in favor of school choice and vouchers is that it will improve K-12 education by allowing parents the freedom to choose the best education for their child. Would you agree or disagree with this statement?



18. One argument against school choice is that it will drain money from public schools. Would you agree or disagree with this statement?

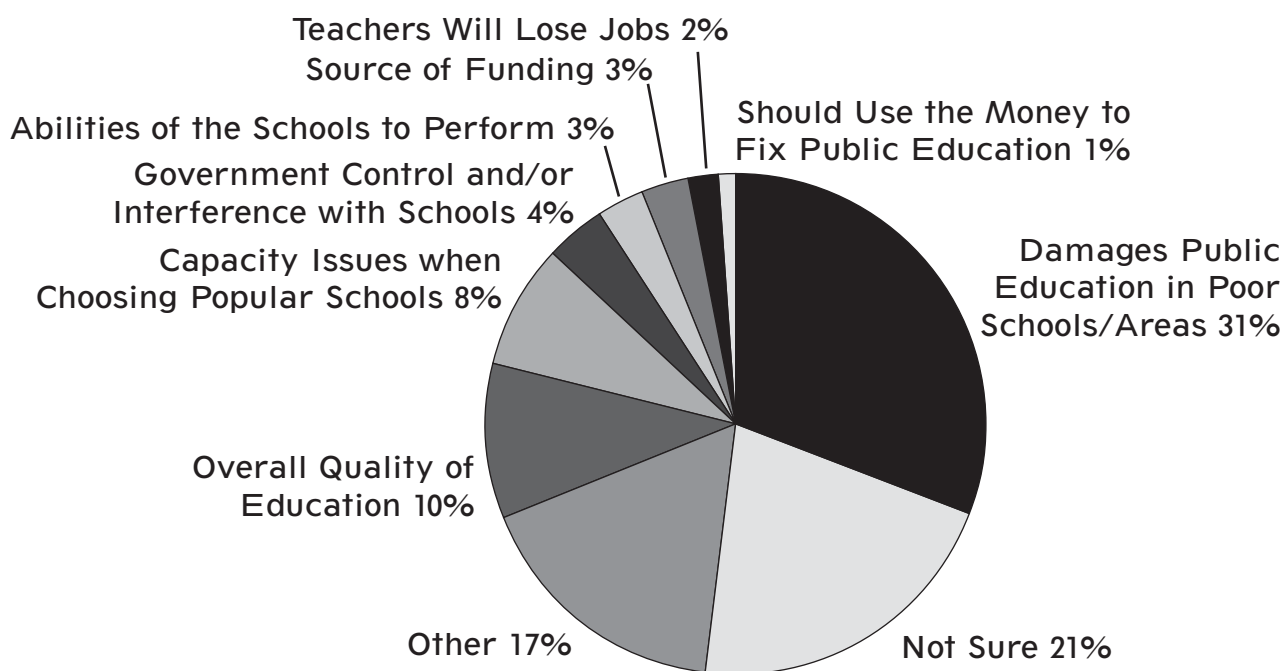


19. What appeals to you most about school choice and vouchers?



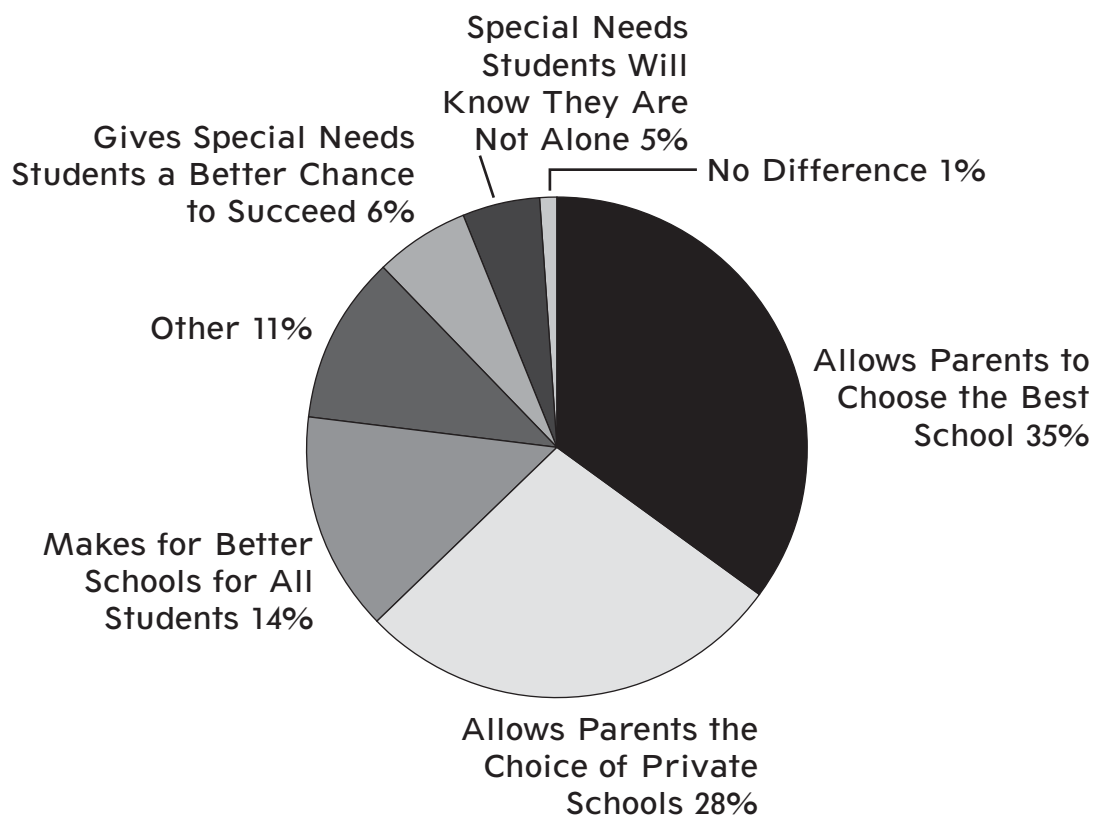
The question was open-ended; respondents could give any response.

20. What causes you the most concerns about school choice and vouchers?



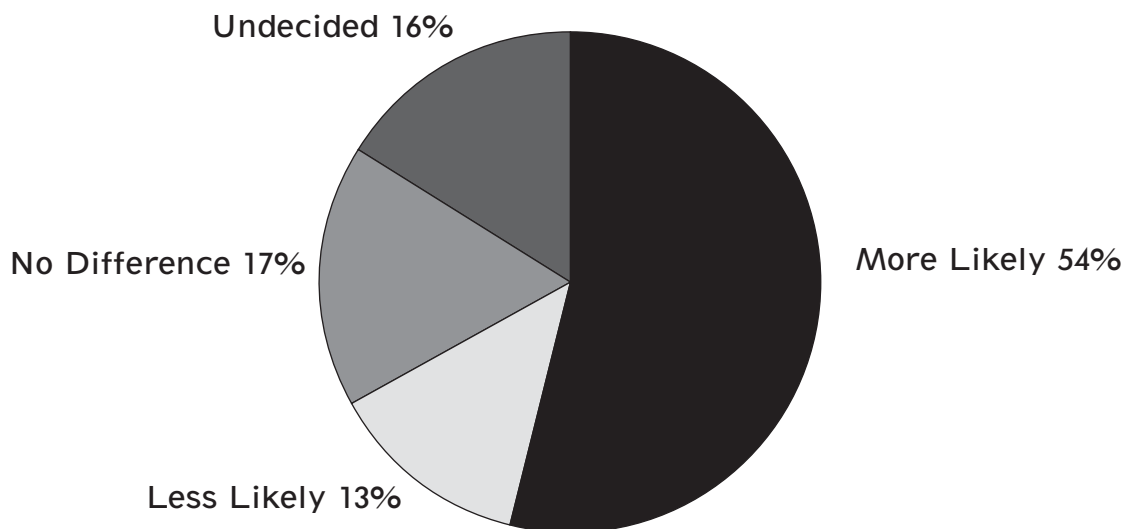
The question was open-ended; respondents could give any response.

21. What appeals to you most about vouchers for special needs students?



The question was open-ended; respondents could give any response.

22. Thinking ahead to the next election, when a candidate for State Senator or Representative supports school choice, would that make you more likely to vote for them, less likely to vote for them, or make no difference whatsoever in your choice of candidates?



Demographics

Are you registered to vote as a Democrat, Libertarian, Republican, with another party affiliation, or with no party affiliation?

DEMOCRAT	40%
LIBERTARIAN	4%
REPUBLICAN	47%
OTHER PARTY AFFILIATION	1%
NO PARTY AFFILIATION	8%

Which of the following age categories do you fall into?

18-25	7%
25-35	19%
36-45	25%
46-55	28%
56-65	12%
OVER 65	9%

If you have children in the household, what age group do they fall into?

0-5	14%
6-10	28%
11-14	26%
15-18	23%
Combination	9%

Are you African-American, Asian, Hispanic, white, or another classification?

AFRICAN-AMERICAN	27%
ASIAN	2%
HISPANIC	5%
WHITE	65%
OTHER	1%

Are you male or female?

MALE	48%
FEMALE	52%

THE MILTON AND ROSE D. FRIEDMAN FOUNDATION

WELCOMES YOUR SUPPORT

As a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, we rely solely on the generous support of our donors to continue promoting the Friedman's vision for school choice throughout the country. Please send your tax-deductible gift today and help interject liberty and choice into our education system. Giving parents the freedom to choose the school that works best for their children is our goal, and with your help we can make it happen.



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